



**Presentation**  
**Congregation of Notre-Dame - Chanoinesses of Saint Augustine**  
**Meeting Association Congregations of Notre Dame**  
**Rome**  
**May 8-11 2023**

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## **1. A short history**

The Congregation of Notre-Dame was born on Christmas night 1597 from a meeting between Pierre Fourier and Alix Le Clerc and from a double desire :

*"To make a new house" (Alix) ; "To open free public schools for girls" (Pierre Fourier)*

The Congregation quickly expanded... But, subject to enclosure at the time of its canonical recognition by Rome, the apostolic life desired by the two Founders became a "mixed" life, in a monastery/convent, to which was added a small free public school, but this time run by lay people. This is how Alix entered the enclosure - and died - in the first monastery in Nancy.

It was not until Vatican II that the Congregation regained its apostolic nature and became an international Congregation (and no longer a Union of autonomous monasteries).

It can be said that the Congregation of Notre-Dame was born twice, through two Councils :

- The Constitutions of 1617 were written after the Council of Trent (1545-1563), which was convened to counter Protestantism and above all to try to correct the considerable abuses and drifts of the Catholic Church at the time.

Unfortunately, it also hindered the development of the Congregation, since women's religious life was only envisaged and authorised in the monastic form.

- The 1984 Constitutions were written after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), which was convened mainly to renew the Church and open it up more to the world. No one forgets the gesture of Pope John XXIII who launched his work by opening the window!

The Congregation of Notre-Dame, invited to rediscover its origins (aggiornamento), resolutely chose the apostolic life and definitively left behind the mixed - semi-cloistered - life imposed since the Council of Trent.

## **2. Today, how many sisters are we and where are we?**

We are 312 sisters on 4 continents, but in very different proportions and with an accelerating demographic evolution: today Vietnam is the most numerous vicariate : it has 110 sisters, while France has only 52...



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We are present

- in Latin America, in Brazil (51)
- in Central America, in Mexico (2)
- in Asia, in Vietnam (110) and in Hong Kong (4)
- in Congo (53)
- in Europe :
  - in France (52) plus the Generalate (3)
  - in the UK (16)
  - in Belgium (5)
  - in Slovakia (13)

### **3. What is our mission?**

Centred from the beginning on education, its field of action has widened over the years: in schools but also in other training institutes, denominational or not, addressing young people and adults, in the field of health (hospital, psychological clinic), higher education (university, seminaries), theology and exegesis...

Our Chapter of 2022 noted the need for a "CND Educational Pact" which, whatever our country and our insertion is, characterises our educational attitude as Sisters of Notre Dame : whether we are teachers, doctors or social workers,

*"We are fundamentally educators, that is to say, we are sent to each person to help him or her discover and live to the full his or her unique vocation as a man or woman.*

(Acts of the 11th General Chapter - Rome, January 2022)

The double motto of the Congregation: *"To none harm, to all serve"* (Pierre Fourier) and *"Make him grow"* (Alix Le Clerc) animates our mission on the 4 continents. Concerning the school, since 2018, the different educational networks of the countries have visited Brazil, France, Vietnam, Congo and now constitute the "CND International Educational Network". This network represents ~ 44,000 students, 20,000 teachers; It aims to unite schools and educators around the CND charism, with a view to a common reflection on the purpose and challenges of education and evangelisation today. This mission is shared and supported by many Associates in each country.



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#### **4. Our economic situation (Common Fund and Project Office)**

The youngest Vicariates can today self-finance their daily life but not their investments (Vietnam, Congo); others ask for help to restructure their schools, to rationalise their real estate (Brazil).

The oldest ones (in Europe) have reserves but are taking on the burden of ageing.

At the 2014 Chapter, it was decided to create a "Common Fund" and a "Project Office". With the double consequence :

- ⇒ Getting out of the "monasteries/autonomous vicariates" mentality which freezes an unhealthy situation between rich and poor Vicariates; which maintains an equally unhealthy paternalism/maternalism, moreover still tainted with hints of colonialism...

A situation that does not conform to Canon Law, according to which all goods are goods of the Congregation: the money belongs to all; nothing belongs to us... The Common Fund responds to this choice that we have made with the vow of poverty.

- ⇒ How in concrete terms ? By adopting the principle that each country makes a Long Term Forecast (according to norms developed by the Generalate), calculates what it needs to "live and live well" (food, housing, health, old age...) for the next 25 years and either transfers the surplus to the Common Fund or asks for the Common Fund's help.

The Common Fund is therefore first and foremost a question of consistency. It is also an educational tool: where people used to hoard money, they learn to depend on it; where people used to ask, they learn to make a budget, to set up a project. Today, it is the General Council that studies and validates projects in order to ensure their financing; in return, the countries must provide all the information before, during and after implementation (objectives, plans, return on investment).

#### **5. Our challenges today**

Developing leadership skills  
Weaving international belonging  
Accompanying each one